



# PERSONAL SPACE

*Lauren MacLean's genteel abode is a benchmark for idiosyncratic interior design.*

BY DAVID SARIC

**F**or Lauren MacLean—the woman behind the LivingByLo Instagram account, which boasts over 65,000 followers and counting—the fascination with personalizing dwellings began at a young age. Upon moving into an apartment with her mother before branching off on her own, MacLean recalls, she was enthralled by the “elements of a non-traditional layout and oddly sized rooms. It broke down the barriers of how you think a space should look and be used.” She also gained the ability to see any space as *carte blanche* for creative remodelling, where she can revel in an “unexpected use of space and objects, which allows you to project your own tastes in exciting ways.”

This experimental ethos is certainly reflected in her current Montreal residence, which is admired by design enthusiasts and professional interior designers alike. However, when she first took ownership of the home, MacLean admits, she was a bit overwhelmed by its extremely barren state. “I spent most of my first week in here crying, thinking ‘What did I do?’ It was in very rough shape, so I had to struggle between my discouragement and ambition to get through it.” However, she persevered through a focused renovation period, ultimately cultivating an ambiance that emanates a distinct serenity.

A soothing white hue dominates the walls throughout, filling the space with light. Aside from generously sized windows and an all-encompassing alabaster-coloured palette, MacLean insists, proper fixtures are also paramount to enlivening any room. “Lighting has the most power to influence a room by setting the tone. It’s the secret element that, when done right, is creating that beautiful feeling without you even knowing it,” she reveals. Thus lamps appear throughout, usually placed mid-wall, with neutral-coloured shades and low bulb wattage to achieve her desired effect.

Singular homewares such as serpentine candles, biomorphic vases, and other baubles pepper her place in

an incidental way, adding visual intrigue to every nook and cranny. Decorating is not as seamless as one may think, and MacLean admits that “finding furniture and home items isn’t easy, and I am always on the hunt for unique, special pieces. It can really test your patience, but I always force myself to take my time, because eventually, that right piece will come along.” The ubiquity of social media and a broadened global marketplace has allowed MacLean to become acquainted with makers from around the world who speak to her particular vision. “It can be very easy to find things you like just for the sake of being ‘done’, but taking your time to find pieces that you feel so excited about is exactly what develops your connection with your space.”

Working at her day job in the corporate world of IT has allowed her to keep her lodging more of a creative outlet than a business venture. “Because design is such a personal thing to me, I haven’t wanted to let that carry over into a ‘work’ aspect of my life,” she admits. “A career in something so different keeps my connection and passion for design a positive and exciting element in my life.” Treating this apartment as a passion project frees MacLean from any commercial constraints and wholly reflects her tastes and interests, similar to the power of a consciously curated wardrobe.

When choosing to document her apartment on Instagram, MacLean did not expect to become a mini sensation. However, the positive reception is certainly welcome, leading her to a “community of people who can feel some joy or inspiration from what I share. Engaging with others and feeling that positivity has become something so special to me.” MacLean believes that the aesthetic advice that has resonated most with her followers is to “limit the doubt and uncertainty that may come with too much inspiration at our fingertips, and look inward for what you really connect with”—sage words of self-reflection with a universal appeal.

Photographed by Lauren MacLean for @livingbylo.